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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 001705

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND NEA/IPA; PRM FOR FRONT OFFICE AND PRM/ANE; NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR; JOINT STAFF FOR LTG SELVA;
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SUBJECT: GAZA: LIMITED FOOD, FUEL, AND MEDICINE;
INFRASTRUCTURE UNDER STRESS

REF: JERUSALEM 1155

Classified By: Consul General Daniel Rubinstein for reasons 1.4 b,d.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Access to Gaza for goods through Israeli crossing points remains severely constrained. While there are adequate stocks of basic food items in Gaza, the lack of variety and continuing price increases are negatively impacting people's health. A lack of medicine is crippling the health sector. The water and electricity grids, while restored to 2008 levels, suffer from a lack of supplies and basic maintenance. End summary.

Crossings

¶2. (SBU) Kerem Shalom and the conveyor belt at Karni remain the primary crossing points for authorized shipments into Gaza. According to UN OCHA, 2,620 truckloads of supplies entered Gaza in August, a 15 percent increase from July, but approximately one-fifth of what was permitted prior to June ¶2007. UN officials estimate that 70-85 percent are private sector shipments.

¶3. (C) Nahal Oz fuel station transfers approximately 2.2 million liters of industrial fuel per week for the power plant, meeting two-thirds of the plant's capacity of 80MW. OCHA reported that 3,443 tons of cooking gas entered Gaza in August, a 26 percent decrease from July, though still above the monthly averages from January to June. With a few exceptions, the GOI has not permitted the import of diesel or petrol into Gaza since November 2008. However, diesel and petrol continue to flow abundantly through the tunnels from Egypt, and supplies are available in Gaza at low prices due to Egyptian fuel subsidies. A local Gazan fuel distributor reported on September 16 that Egyptian petrol costs NIS 1.9 per liter, while Israeli petrol sells for NIS 6 per liter; Egyptian diesel costs 1.3 per liter and Israeli diesel is NIS 5 per liter.

¶4. (SBU) Erez crossing is only open for international personnel and urgent medical cases. In August, according to GOI statistics, 737 staff members of international organizations entered and 740 exited Gaza; 1,062 patients and their companions crossed into Israel. Israeli NGO Physicians for Human Rights reported that between January and June, the GOI denied or delayed the approval of 51 percent of Gazan applicants for medical treatment abroad; the delayed applications resulted in missed appointments, and consequently the patients remained in Gaza.

Food

¶ 15. (SBU) Food supplies make up the bulk of shipments into Gaza from Israel, constituting 77 percent of the truckloads in August. An OCHA official in Gaza reported that the lack of economic activity, the increased price of food, and a lack of variety in the food supplies allowed in through Israeli crossings are negatively affecting the diet of the population. People are not starving, he said, but they are buying less and poorer quality food due to high food prices, as well as the need to economize because of price increases among other essential goods.

Electricity

¶ 16. (C) Gaza has been experiencing a shortage of 70MW of electricity supply, leading to rolling blackouts of 4-8 hours per day, according to Omar Kittaneh, the Chairman of the PA National Energy Authority. The Gaza Power Plant produces approximately 55MW, while Gaza receives 117MW from Israel and 17MW from Egypt. World Bank contacts in Gaza report that the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company (GEDCO) is in short supply of 400 electrical spare parts and out of stock of 150 others, resulting in some areas of Gaza remaining unconnected to the grid. The World Bank claims that GEDCO filed requests over the last two years for clearance of 141 items remaining at Israeli ports, receiving a response for only 97 items (30 requests rejected and 67 pending). Kittaneh notes, however, that the electricity infrastructure is largely restored to levels predating December 2008-January 2009 Israeli combat operations in Gaza.

Water

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¶ 17. (SBU) The Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) in Gaza reports that 10,000 people in Gaza do not have access to the water network, while 60 percent of the population is without daily access. Only 10 percent of the water supply in Gaza meets World Health Organization standards. OCHA reported that 50-80 million liters of untreated and partially treated wastewater has been discharged into the environment, including the Mediterranean Sea, every day since January 2008. The deterioration of the system is a result of stalled maintenance projects and upgrades due to lack of supplies, severe shortages of fuel and electricity, and damage suffered during December 2008-January 2009 Israeli combat operations in Gaza. The lack of treatment has led to contamination of Gaza's aquifer, from which both the Gazan and Israeli networks draw water. World Bank, international, and CMWU officials are concerned that the winter rainy season will exacerbate these pollution problems.

Health

¶ 18. (SBU) OCHA reports that the Central Drug Store now lacks 100 of 480 essential drugs. Medical shipments into Gaza have been insufficient in quantity and variety to address the shortage. The Central Drug Store expects the number of out-of-stock essential items to rise to 140 in September.
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